International Seabed Regime: India’s Interests and Policy Options

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Rising demands for economic resources to support a growing population and rapid development of technology have drawn attention towards the ocean – man’s last frontier. Ocean space is now being used more extensively than ever, not only for conventional purposes but also for more recently developed resources. The presence of manganese nodules on the ocean floor has been known since the voyage of the Glomar Challenger in the 1870’s, but it is only in the past few years that the developments in seabed mining technology have shown promise of transforming this geological phenomenon into a valuable economic resource. Existing international maritime law and institutions are simply not adequate to govern the manifold usages and resources and must be changed in order to avoid potential conflicts in the distribution of yet unappropriated wealth of the oceans. The purpose of this paper is to examine India’s alternatives from the perspective of her national interest with respect to the development of a new regime to govern the exploitation of the resources in the seabed beyond national jurisdiction. The formulation of India’s position with regard to a regulatory framework for the seabed must take into account not only the known resources but also the potential future discoveries and technological breakthroughs. After a brief mention of the current world concern with the regulation of international seabed resources, and the salient features of seabed mineral production, we discuss India’s perspective and goals on this issue. The paper concludes with an analysis of alternative seabed regimes from India’s perspective.